General Services Administration
Plain Writing Act Compliance Report
August 2011

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires agencies to write documents for the public that are easy to understand and use. We must use plain language in any document that:

- is necessary for obtaining any federal government benefit or service or filing taxes;
- provides information about any federal government benefit or service; or
- explains to the public how to comply with a requirement that the federal government administers or enforces.

This plan describes how GSA is complying with the Plain Writing Act. This plan is a draft; we invite public comment and feedback. Please send comments to plainlanguage@gsa.gov.

GSA's efforts will go beyond compliance. We're committed to open government, transparency, and customer service—which we can't do if the public can't easily understand what we say. Plain language is our primary way to improve customer service and put people—our customers—first.

We're dedicated to the letter *and* the spirit of the Plain Writing Act and the Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service executive order. We will use existing resources and actively support the plain language community, particularly the Plain Language Information and Action Network (PLAIN).

I. Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing and Coordinators
The Act requires us to "designate 1 or more agency points-of-contact to receive and respond to public input on (i) agency implementation of this Act; and (ii) the agency reports required under section 5."

- Deputy Administrator Susan Brita is the senior agency official for plain writing. She will ensure the plan's implementation. Contact her at plainlanguage@gsa.gov.

- Katherine Spivey is the Plain Language Launcher, coordinating the plain language implementation program. Contact her at 703-306-6656 or plainlanguage@gsa.gov.

II. **Describe the agency communications released by your office that follow the Plain Writing guidelines**

By October 13, 2011, we will write all new or substantially revised covered documents—including web pages—in plain language. As recommended by the Office of Management and Budget, we will follow the [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#) and this [plain language checklist](#), adapted from work done by the Office of Personnel Management, PLAIN, and the National Institutes of Health.

We will strive to produce all documents in plain writing, including those documents not covered by the Act.

We will prioritize the most common GSA documents and websites that need to be rewritten in plain language, considering the types of documents and how many people visit or download the pages. We will then analyze the data from the website, gather search terms from web logs, and consider moving frequently asked questions (FAQs) to our customer service database.

III. **Inform agency staff of Plain Writing Act's requirements**
The law states that agencies must "communicate the requirements of this Act to the employees of the agency". To comply, we're planning or have done the following:

- Posted information at www.gsa.gov/plainlanguage, linked from GSA's Open Gov page
- Posted information on the agency's intranet, Insite
- Update the GSA wiki page regularly
- Arrange for the Administrator to post a related video blog and notify all employees
- Send an email message to all employees from the Deputy Administrator
- Brief the senior management team
- Create an internal "Leadership in a Minute" video on plain language that's sent to all staff
- Produce and distribute signs and posters to all GSA buildings (headquarters and regions).

IV. **Training**
We're offering a variety of training to ensure that GSA staff have the skills they need. Training will be offered at the basic, intermediate, and advanced/specialist levels:

- Web Manager University - a series of webinars on plain language
- Web Manager University - collaborating with GSA Online University to offer on-demand training
- Web Manager University - an intermediate-level class on plain language web writing is scheduled for September 2011, to be repeated quarterly
- Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) - basic and intensive "bootcamp" style classes and webinars on specific plain language topics
- National Institutes of Health - online plain language training course
- Brownbags - We've held three brown-bag discussions already (June 21, June 28, August 2) Future sessions will be the first Tuesday of every month from 12-1 p.m. at GSA Headquarters; also available to regional offices through Telepresence or webinar/conference call
- 2012 GSA Expo in San Antonio - professional development/compliance courses

We'll also develop training for GSA-specific audiences:

- Press and public affairs officers, agency bloggers, and writer-editors
- Policy and regulation writers
- Human resources associates and managers who write position descriptions and job announcements
- Contracting officers and contracting officers' technical representatives (COTRs) who write requests for proposals and statements of work
- Program managers

V. **Ongoing compliance/sustaining change**
Our strategy ensures that we're complying with the Act. We will:

- Continuously train current employees
- Train new employees at new employee orientations
- Encourage our contractors to take plain language training
- Create new forms, policies, and procedures in plain language
- Review existing documents for plain language
- Update employee performance standards to include plain writing proficiency
- Rewrite the most visited pages on GSA.gov in plain language and measure performance, by monitoring feedback emails and satisfaction surveys
- Establish and maintain the GSA Plain Language Pacers, a group of early adopters who will act as point people and mentors in their divisions and offices, and take train-the-trainer plain language training. The Pacers group will include people at all levels of the agency and use the GSA wiki to share before/after examples and success stories

Changing our writing culture will require hard work; employees will need to acquire new skills and abandon ingrained writing habits. With training, senior-level encouragement, and customer service feedback, we expect to meet our performance goals.

VI. Agency's plain writing website
GSA's plain language webpage is www.gsa.gov/plainlanguage. Contact us at plainlanguage@gsa.gov if you have trouble understanding any GSA web pages or documents. We will respond to you within three business days.

VII. **Evaluating Customer Success after Implementing Plain Language Plan**
We're exploring the best way to measure our plain language progress, especially how we measure plain language improvements to GSA.gov. We'll revise this document to include our specific metrics plan and performance goals. Possibilities include:

- Number of staff trained
- Appoint at least one Pacer per GSA office (service, region, or program area)
- Conduct baseline testing on the most frequently used program pages on GSA.gov, other GSA websites, and other key service documents
- Conduct follow-up testing to measure improvement and identify continuing problems
- Publish before- and after-examples and metrics to show benefits of plain language changes
- Initiate new feedback/rating feature on gsa.gov and regularly publish results and agency response